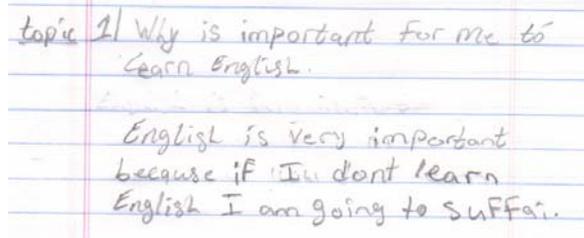# Regimes of Multilingualism and
the Language of Literacy in The Gambia

kasper.juffermans@hku.hk
School of English, HKU

HKU Constituent Theme- Languages, Media & Communication:
Language in Education & Assessment Seminar Series.

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"Utterance as such is wholly a product of social interaction . . . as determined by the circumstances of the discourse, and . . . as determined by **the whole aggregate of conditions under which any given community of speakers operates**."
(Vološinov 1986 [1929]: 93)

Overview

1) photo Ba-Abdoulie's letter [slide 5 - 11]
in Saateeba, rural Gambia
> ethnography of SPEAKING, question: Why are letters written in English?

2) survey of multilingualism [slide 15 - 24]
two communities: Saateeba (village), Bundung Six Junction (urban neighbourhood)
> quantitative analysis, descriptive sociolinguistics (with Ellen Vanantwerpen)
How multilingual is The Gambia and how is The Gambia multilingual?

3) English writing contest [slide 27 - 36]
in Saateending L.B.S., school in the village next to Saateeba (rural Gambia)
> new literacy studies, the language of instruction debate, linguistic imperialism & voice
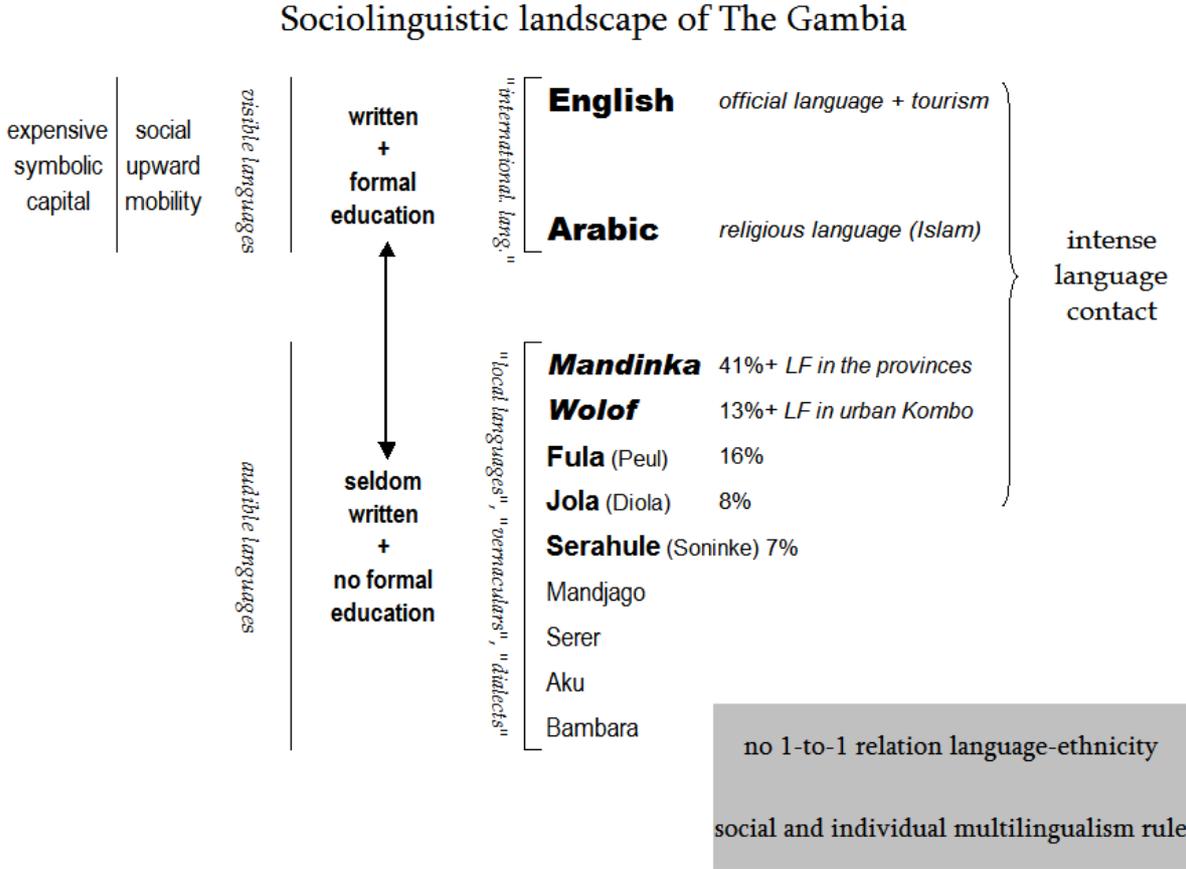
4) signboard literacies [slide 37 - 40]
in Sayerr Jobe Avenue, Serrekunda (urban Gambia), at walking distance or a D5 taxi ride from Bundung Six Junction.
> new literacy studies: literacy as multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996; Kress 2003): the future of literacy?
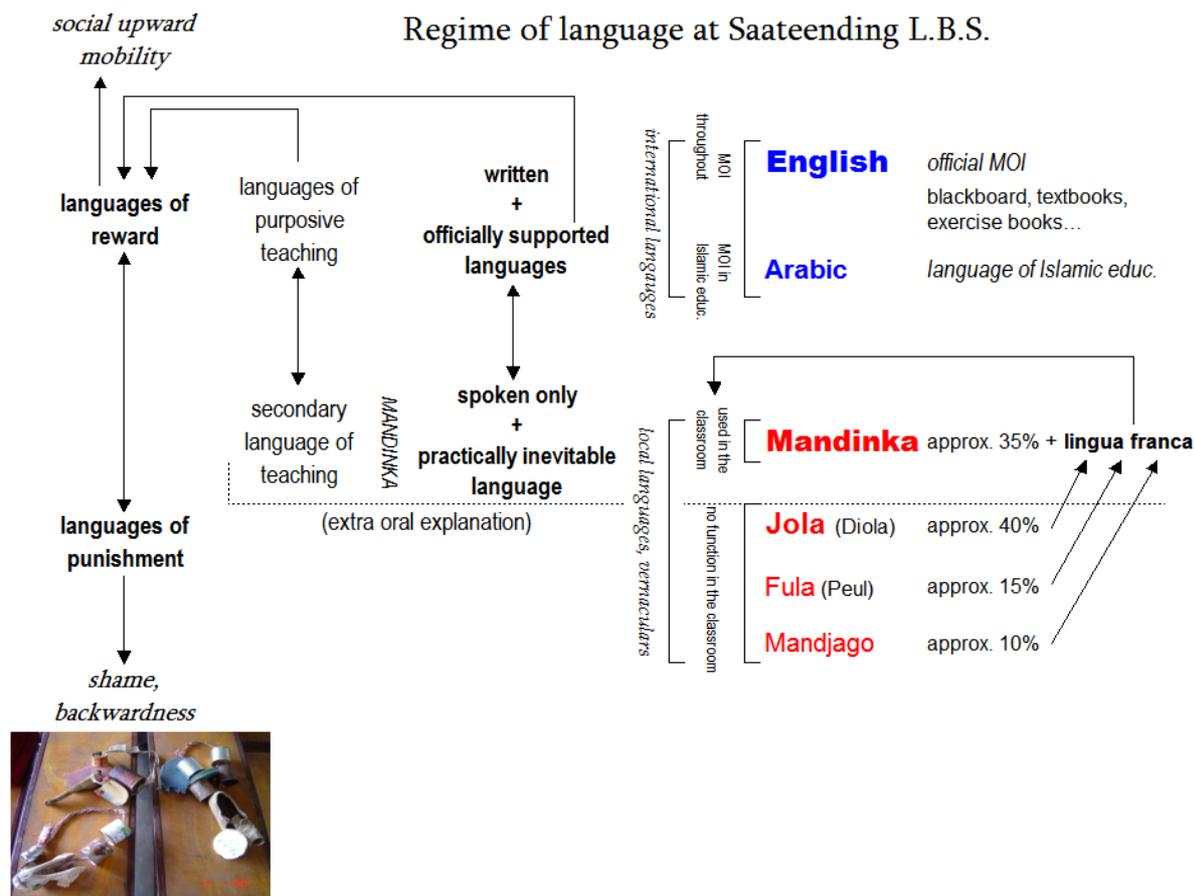
Regimes of multilingualism

Whenever and wherever multiple languages co-occur, they do so in functionally and socially unequal ways. Regime of multilingualism is a term inspired by (or frankly borrowed from) the work in linguistic anthropology on language ideologies: e.g., Schieffelin et al. (1998) and Kroskrity (2000). Especially the title of Kroskrity's book, *Regimes of Language*, and the title of his introductory chapter, *Regimenting languages*, are important.

I use the term in a more practical or descriptive manner, as a framework to describe the visible and audible sociolinguistic landscape of a particular place and to lay bare some of the inequalities and social relations between speakers of different languages. The metaphor of a military regime (exertion of power & control) is interesting in explaining why people do this and not that with language A, and this and not that with language B. Such a regime can be more or less stringent, and regulate almost everything or only minor aspects of one's linguistic life.

Sociolinguistic landscape of The Gambia

(from Juffermans 2006: 34)

Regime of language at Saateending L.B.S.

social upward mobility

languages of reward

languages of purposive teaching

written + officially supported languages

international languages

MOI throughout

MOI in Islamic educ.

English — *official MOI* — blackboard, textbooks, exercise books…

Arabic — *language of Islamic educ.*

MANDINKA

secondary language of teaching

spoken only + practically inevitable language

(extra oral explanation)

languages of punishment

shame, backwardness

local languages, vernaculars

used in the classroom

no function in the classroom

Mandinka approx. 35% + **lingua franca**

Jola (Diola) approx. 40%

Fula (Peul) approx. 15%

Mandjago approx. 10%

(from Juffermans 2006: 39)

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